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ABSTRACT

Children will meet one less obstacle to making the transition from spoken to written fluency in language if, during the transition period, they experience written language that corresponds structurally to their spoken language patterns. Familiar children's folksongs, because they contain some of the structure of children's oral language, provide structural redundancy, and allow simultaneous seeing and reading, are a useful vehicle for aiding in this transition process. Several songs--"Had a Little Rooster," "Go Tell Aunt Rhodie," "Buckeye Jim," and so on--exhibit correspondences to the oral language patterns of children as defined by Ruth G. Strickland and can form the basis for an effective instructional program for beginning readers. (KS)

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"USING CHILDREN'S FOLKSONGS TO TRANSITION BEGINNING READERS FROM THE FAMILIAR STRUCTURE OF ORAL LANGUAGE TO THE STRUCTURE OF WRITTEN LANGUAGE"

(CONVENTION MEETING TITLE) "VARIED APPROACHES TO TURN ON STUDENTS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL"

(TOPIC OF CONVENTION SESSION) "COMBINING FOLK SONGS AND LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE"

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"USING CHILDREN'S FOLKSONGS TO TRANSITION BEGINNING READERS FROM THE FAMILIAR STRUCTURE OF ORAL LANGUAGE TO THE STRUCTURE OF WRITTEN LANGUAGE"

Recent information regarding the structural nature of language suggests that spoken and written language are not as directly related as was once thought. The assumption that written language is only recorded speech or "written down talk" is often translated into reading materials and methodologies which do not allow for structural differences, and which therefore can carry a potential for possible reading difficulties for children. (6:88-9)

> "...new information suggests instead that English speech and English writing are mutually independent systems of symbols, each representing linguistic forms--linguistic forms being abstract language units conveying both lexical and grammatical information. Listening involves the identification of lexical and grammatical information that is represented phonologically, and reading involves the identification of information that is represented orthographically." (6:88)

The commonality of written and spoken language exists through their mutual function as variant expressions of language, and not through the one being the graphic representation of the other. The correspondence that does exist between spoken and written language is orthographic. That correspondence can be used to help teach children to read, but it cannot be interpreted as a total correspondence, for spoken language and written language utilize different lexical and grammatical customs to convey meaning. (6:89)

Because children have already learned to recognize, produce, control, and derive meaning from spoken linguistic forms when they reach school, they will bring their linguistic expectations and responses for spoken language to the task of learning written language. If written language is, indeed, a separate linguistic function from spoken language, not all of the spoken language behaviors developed by children will be appropriate to the

subsequent development of written language fluency. And if the vocabulary and the syntactic structure of the oral language of the child can be taken as that language custom which is most familiar to him, then that child may very well be learning to read a written language that is essentially unfamiliar both structurally and lexically.

Written language, more than spoken language, is characterized by the use of groupings of basic structural patterns into compound, complex and compound-complex sentences, by the use of transformations of basic structural patterns, and by the use of pattern elaborations in the forms of single words or word groups, and/or phrases or clauses embedded within basic structures. Strickland (16:70) notes that the correspondence between written structure of selected basal readers and the structure of the oral language of children in her study appeared to be random. Goforth (5) found that only 28.38 percent of the written structure of tradebooks she examined corresponded to the most common patterns appearing in the oral language of the children in the Strickland study. Teachers, therefore, cannot assume that beginning readers are familiar with the grammatic customs of written language. Yet much beginning reading material makes small effort to accommodate itself to the syntactic custom of spoken language in order to maximize the correspondence between spoken and written language while children are learning to decode written language.

When beginning readers read, they first seek meaning, and resort to decoding or examination of grapheme-phoneme relationships only when decoding is necessary to discover meaning. Beginning readers seek meaning in the syntax of printed language by relating it to the syntax of their personal (oral) language. (1) Meaning is carried in written language by individual words, by word arrangement in syntactic structures, by the reader's language

behavior expectations and by the reader's own social, cultural and economic curcumstances. (4:99-110)

Reading for meaning at the single word level eliminates most cues for meaning, as the single word in English is an "unstable element" whether taken as "a semantic or structural unit." (9:xvii) The full meaning-carrying capacity of the word in English is approached when that word is placed in combination with other words in a syntactic pattern. Total or "deep structure" meaning is found in that combination of the lexical information carried by individual words contained in a given order or structure, the structures themselves and the interpretation of that deep structure meaning brought to the written language by the reader in his specific life circumstances.

"Meaning is at the core of every reading lesson." (17:65) When an individual reads, therefore, he seeks closure over whole deep structure meaning, and will withhold that closure until his own "sense" of language-unit completeness is satisfied. It would seem, then, that the efforts of decoding activities must be directed at the "building up of high-speed recognition responses to letters" and words in sequence, to aid beginning readers to close over whole structure and reach for "deep structure" meaning. (3:49)

The primary occupation of teachers of beginning reading is helping children relate speech sounds to representative graphic symbols. But the beginning reader is transferring a total language response ability from one form of the language to another. (4:188) Therefore, developing the child's ability to evaluate, analyze and reason about language is also a proper beginning reading activity, and one which requires that children intuitively recognize and respond to whole written structure. (14:176) Because beginning readers have already achieved language control, beginning reading instruction need not be as concerned with teaching the sound of the language, new words and/or new meanings and new grammatical structures, as with building upon

the language control already achieved by the children. (3:48) "Reading must be tied at every step to the language of the child." (3:48) Control of basic patterning is essential and should be "taught at the earliest possible time." (9:10) Once a child can read basic patterning, he should be introduced to inversions and expansions of basic patterns, to substitutions and embeddings within patterns, and to transformations and subordinations of patterns.

The beginning reader's ability to perceive entire written language structures as wholes and derive meaning from the structural cues thus presented might be facilitated if that structure were familiar, that is, having lexical and structural features common to the spoken language of the reader. A closer structural correspondence could be achieved if reading materials used for the transition period were "speech written down" (6:89), or were sentence patterns that were structurally similar to those children speak, edited only as much as necessary to satisfy the rudimentary requirements of written prose. (2:91)

Common children's folksongs can be used to present children with high frequencies of familiar basic patterns of spoken language such that children can simultaneously see and say (sing) the patterns. The structure of the language of many common children's folksongs, is not the often highly elaborated structure of written language, and does not contain as many combined, subordinated, embedded or transformed patterns. And since the language of many such songs is composed of repetitious patterning, folksongs can be deliberately selected to provide children with repeated contact with specific structures in order to reinforce oral patterning and to introduce those patterns in print. Strickland identifies the following structural patterns as those ten most frequently used by the children in her study. (16:29)

1. 1 2 4 or the subject/verb/object pattern serving as the whole phonological unit (that segment of speech which is terminated by the speaker by a final clear-cut pause.)

2. T 1 2 4 or the subject/verb/object pattern preceeded by another whole pattern both within the phonological unit.

3. 1 2 4 + T or the subject/verb/object pattern followed by a connector plus another pattern both within the phonological unit.

4. 1 2b 5 or the subject/copulative verb/subjective-complement pattern.

5. T 1 2 4 + T.

6. T 1 2b 5.

7. 1 2 4 T.

8. 1 2 M_1 + T or the subject/verb/movable element-denoting-location-or-place pattern.

9. 1 2.

10. 1 2 M_1.

The following songs display both redundancy of pattern use and correspondence of patterns to the patternings found in the oral language of children.

SONG TITLE	PATTERN	% OCCURRENCE OF PATTERN IN ALL PATTERNS	
"Had a Little Rooster" (:34-5)	2 4 M_1	25.0	0% combinations of patterns
	1 2b 5	25.0	0% subordination of patterns
			0% embeddings of pattern
			Average Sentence length-6.75 words
"Too-Ril-Re-Too" (10)	1 2b 5	25.0	0% combinations
	1 2 M_2 4	12.5	0% subordinations
	1 2 4 M_2*	25.0	0% embeddings
	1 2 M1	25.0	ASL - 9.13 words
	1 2 4	12.5	
			0% combinations
"Mamma's Gone to the Mailboat" (12:94)	2 4	50.0	0% combinations
	1 2 M_1	50.0	0% embeddings
			ASL - 5.13 words
"Have A Little Dog" (15:114-5	2 4	100.0	58.3% combinations
			16.0% subordinations
			8.30% embeddings
			ASL - 11.17 words
"Bought Me A Cat"** (15:114-5)	2 3 4	13.3	0% combinations
	1 2 4	13.3	0% subordinations
	2 4 M1	13.3	0% embeddings
	1 2 M_2	60.0	ASL - 4.02 words

Folksongs

"Buckeye Jim"	M_1 1 2 M_1	16.6	33.3% combinations
(11:12-13)	M_1 1 2 M_2	16.6	0% subordinations
	1 2	33.3	0% embeddings
			ASL - 8.83 words
"Go Tell Aunt Rhodie"**	2 4	18.7	0% combinations
(8:28)	1 2b 5	6.2	0% subordinations
	1 2 4	6.2	25.0 embeddings
	1 2	50.0	ASL - 5.42 words
"The Green Grass Grew	1 2 M_1	50.0	0% combinations
All Around"	M_1 1 2b 5	12.5	0% subordinations
(13:388-90)	4 1 2	12.5	-% embeddings
	1 2b M_1	25.0	ASL - 20.0 words

* M_2 indicates a movable element denoting "manner."

**not all patterns appearing in song language are listed.

Singing such songs with children will open to children the experience of the folk process, of sharing and experiencing language production in the group, and will provide them with a muscial framework for the recall and singing back of language patterns. The employment of the musical framework to teach oral language and to preserve oral literature is as old as human culture and has certainly been a vehicle for teaching the linguistic forms of spoken language to children for most of human history. Oral patterns can become familiar patterns by singing songs which contain them. And these same patterns can easily be presented to children as written language that can be seen, read, and sung.

To insure that children are following the written patterns while they are also singing and hearing those patterns, teachers can use folksongs as language experience activities. Many common folksongs for children contain patterns or parts of patterns that are not "givens." That is, using the structural formula required by the song to satisfy the structural dictates of a particular line or verse, the children must invent the language to be sung. They are, then, using their own vocabularies and performing internal substitutions which conform to the structural patterns of the song. Most often children hardly need to be told what structural patterns are required. After

singing and experiencing the structure of a particular song, they are able to generalize the pattern requirements and supply the proper forms.

In "The Wind Blow(s) East" (15:66-7) children substitute single nouns into the direct object position.

"The wind blows east,
The wind blows west,
The wind blows_____all over town.
The wind blows_____all over town.
The wind blows_____all over town."

Children will begin with the obvious, "dirty dirt", move to the ridiculous with much delight, "frogs and toads, slithery snakes," and eventually settle upon the figurative, "snowsongs."

"I Love My Shirt", another common and structurally basic song requires children to invent and substitute nouns in both subject and object positions.

"I love my _____,
I love my _____,
I love my _____,
And my _____ loves me."

"Bye m' Bye" (15:71) provides for use of words in subject and object positions, and for verb, and movable substitution. If, in the building process children invent strings of pattern elements that exceed this song's rhythm, and they will for "By'm Bye", the entire invention is then sung on one note. The given repeated pattern for "By'm Bye" is "By'm Bye, By'm Bye", followed by the invented pattern, a counting sequence, and "Good Lord, By'm Bye, by'm bye, Good Lord, By'm bye." A most basic invention might be "leaves falling" or "children singing," then "number one, number two, number three, etc." However, once children understand what kind of linguistic puzzle game they are playing, they will come up with such as: "By'm bye, by'm bye, long legged pink storks sitting on the roof of my house and dropping peanut shells all over, number one, number two...Good Lord, by'm bye, by'm bye, Good Lord, by'm bye."

One third grade boy announced that he wanted to sing about a hippopotamus living in his bath tub. One second grader decided she wanted to sing about her grandmother sitting barefoot on top of a baby grand piano eating a pistachio ice cream cone.

The children's inventions are often deliberately illogical, but their adherence to pattern requirements is most precise. "To be bound too closely to the literal--to a hard and fast relation between the song and a particular use of it--is to cramp the imagination of both child and adult (15:20). Many of the songs themselves delight in the gymnastics of illogic. Not so far from the spirit of this is the child who sings about the rain raining all over the piano instead of the grass, or Jon the Rabbit eating nails and splinters instead of carrots, or the man who was so mad he jumped into a dog's bark." (15:48)

Songs such as the above are an exciting, "living" experience in language because they grow out of the experiences of the children and become a reflection of the structure of their language. This musical addition to any reading program provides a substantial transition for children from spoken to written language structure. And the songs satisfy the need to provide children with whole-pattern reading experience in patterns that are familiar to the children.

Fries (4:188) suggests limiting materials or delaying reading instruction rather than failing to provide such experiences for children.

> "If the only materials immediately available for teaching reading contain any considerable body of language forms outside of those already well controlled by the pupil--new word shapes, new word meanings, new grammatical structures--then the reading should be postponed until either the language control of the pupil includes firm habit responses to these forms or the materials can be produced for which the pupil is ready."

Children might meet one less obstacle to transitioning from spoken to written (reading) fluency in language if, during the transition period, they met written language that corresponded structurally to their spoken language. Common children's folksongs, because they contain some of the

structure of the oral language of children, because they provide for structural redundancy, and because they allow for simultaneous seeing and reading (singing) are a proper vehicle for aiding the child's transition from spoken to written language control.

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